

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Marian Bell Fairchild, from July 22, 1902, to July 24, 1902

Very good in ports BEINN BHREAGH, Baddeck, N. S., July 22, 1902. Dear Marian: —

Your Mamma and I have just returned from Minneapolis, and are glad to receive at last some assurances that you have reached the other side in safety. Your Uncle Charlie reports two cablegrams, and I have a letter from you written on board the steamer June 28th, and one from Miss Sicard. Both letters having crossed the Atlantic instead of having come ashore by the pilot. Also pretty little postal card, with a Netherlands stamp on it, and a pretty little girl, with bright gold ornaments setting off her eyes. We are glad to know that you are settled at last, and I have been studying the map to find out exactly where you are, — Germany, Holland, Austria, or Switzerland, — I am not quite sure which. I only know you are in a place for people with long-swelled-backs — at least that is how I remember the name Langenschwaldbach.

We have just been reading your steamer letter, written at odds and ends of time, and bearing the last date July 7, 1902. Miss Safford is making a typewritten copy for you, and proposes to preserve in this way letters describing your movements, so that when you come to write your Memoires you will have some material from which to choose. You may also like to show to your children and grandchildren an account of your adventures written at the time — so hurry up and have some adventures. Get over your swelled-back treatment and go off somewhere and have a nice time.

We had a very nice time in Minneapolis, barring the heat — the prickly heat — and usual accompaniments — ten thousand 2 Daisy members of the N.E.A. said to be in town. I succeeded in having the title of the Department of the Deaf, Blind and Feeble-Minded

Library of Congress

changed to "Department of Special Education". Everyone seems to be pleased with the change.

From Minneapolis we went to Sault St. Marie, and returned home via Georgian Bay, Lake Ontario, and St. Lawrence. The coolest line. Half way between Minneapolis and the Soo, about half past two in the morning, I happened to look out of the window to see why we were staying so long at a little place, and to my surprise I saw two men struggling together on the ground. As my eyes became accustomed to the darkness I could see that one was the colored porter of the sleeping car, who had his arms round another man who was swaying backwards and forwards half lying on the ground. The colored porter swung a light and went off in the direction of the engine, and I could then see that the other man was writhing upon the ground as if in agony. Presently I heard a voice — "For God's sake, give me a glass of water!" — and a breakman tried to enter our car, but the door was locked and the porter away. I got up out of bed and let him in, and asked him what the matter was. I then found that the conductor had been crushed between two cars and was writhing about outside on the grass. I got on some clothes and hurried out — but found that the breaksman had carried him on board the train. No doctor at hand, and everybody seemed to look to me to do something or other, so I put on my glasses and my wisest air, and proceeded to make a physical examination. According to the conductor's account his head was crushed between his shoulders But I rather suspect that his shoulders leaving the head alone slipped 3 for the skin was taken off the face on both sides, where he had been nipped, and his ability to move his arms showed that no bones were crushed. Even the collar bones were all right. We stripped him to the waist and found that he was not losing blood. In process of time a doctor put in an appearance, who examined him carefully and found that no bones were broken, and comforted the man with the assurance that he would be all right in a few days.

This assurance and a few drops of brandy restored the color to the man's cheeks, and no longer believing himself to be dying, he looked less like a corpse, and brightened up. He

Library of Congress

was actually able to smoke a cigar. When the doctor reported no bones broken the man feebly ejaculated — that — he thought — he must have been made of rubber.

In Montreal we were joined by your Grandfather Bell, Mrs. Bell, Miss Mace and MR. ARTHUR W. MCCURDY. We left Montreal Sunday at noon, arriving here yesterday in a sail boat from Schnacadie. My father, Mrs. Bell, and Mr. McCurdy left Montreal Monday evening and are expected here this evening. I have not yet recovered from the effects of Minneapolis, but a day or two of quiet rest will make me all right. Mr. McCurdy telegraphs — from Truro, I think — asking Dr. McDonald to meet my father at the Grand Narrows, as he has hurt his knee in getting on the train.

I hear Mr. Atwater is here, and leaves again for South Africa on Saturday. He is suffering from an enteric leg, whatever that may be..

4

Jean says I have told you nothing but calamities, and that I better say something pleasant now.

Bert has returned from Pittsburgh looking like a shadow — — — — — another calamity. — don't know anything else to say, except that Elsie and baby are looking sweet — Oh, one other thing, I suppose you know —

In relation to beauty — — — — —

CHAPTER II. 1902, July 24 My dear Daidums: —

I am feeling better this morning, so I won't say anything about calamities, except that my father had quite a severe fall in Truro off the steps of the Learment Hotel, sprained one wrist and cut his forehead open above one eye. A young doctor on the train sewed up the wound. He has had a good night and seems all right this morning.

Library of Congress

We came here from Montreal via the Intercolonial, and I was very much surprised and delighted at the character of the country in the St. Lawrence valley in the neighborhood of Quebec (Port Levis) I don't understand, though, why the French people there should build houses with roofs of such a queer shape; every roof has a curl on it. This certainly makes a much prettier building than the right angled roof to which we are accustomed here.

5

But what is the use of the curl? The rafters on which the roof rests are perfectly straight, but the roof is built up on either side to make the curl This is obviously a more expensive construction than the straight roof, and I can't imagine that poor people and farmers would choose the more expensive form simply for aesthetic reasons. The curl is not sufficient to form a gutter for rain water and I can only imagine that it has some reference to snow fall and preventing an avalanch from the roof, at all events I am pretty sure that there must be some utilitarian reason for the prevalence of the curled roof.

The farms below Quebec, on the lower side of the river are the finest I have seen in America. The soil exceedingly fertile, ground well tilled, and vegetable gardens so clear of weeds as to remind me of Japan. The French people — like the Japanese seem to be sociable and dislike solitude. This modifies the whole appearance of the country. The farm houses, instead of being well separated from one another in the midst of their farms, are all together at one end. The farms form narrow strips of great length, with the houses and barns all at the same end, so that the farm houses form a practically continuous village for miles and miles.

6

Each farm seemed to be provided with a very long barn, and at the side of the barn, facing the railroad, was a curious structure, the nature of which I could not at first make out, but closer view of some barns showed me that these were windmills. It was Sunday when we passed through and the windmills were not in operation nor did they have sails on them.

7

Library of Congress

Each windmill operated a large wheel carrying a belt which passed through the wall of the barn into the interior, working machinery of various sorts inside. The conductor of the train told me the framers used these windmills for chopping up food for their cattle, sawing wood, and performing various farm operations. Altogether I was impressed with the prosperity of the Quebec farms. The cattle and horses, too, seemed very much superior to any in this part of the world. The farms are small and well cultivated, and I think that many Americans might take a lesson from the French Canadian farmers of the St. Lawrence valley.

A most extraordinary story is published in Frank Leslie's popular monthly for May. David Buffum claims to have ascended an extinct volcano on the Island of Lliani, just off the coast of Haiti in the West Indies. This island is wholly uninhabited, the negroes believing it to be haunted by "duppies" — spirits or ghosts—Instead of finding the crater a flat table-land Mr. Buffum found a vast shallow impression extending over the whole top, so that the top was like a gigantic saucer, about five miles long by two broad. This was practically a plain enclosed by giant walls. The bottom was covered with grass, and near the center of the plain was a natural pond, apparently very deep, and about an acre in superficial area. While on the summit Mr. Buffum saw a herd of small animals approaching — about 25 or 30 of them, apparently having no fear of man. They were smaller than sheep, and when they came near turned out to be horses — perfectly formed diminutive horses — the largest 19 inches high. Next day he returned to the 8 and succeeded in capturing eight or nine of the ponies, and took them to his farm Meadow Island, Narraganset, Rhode Island. The animals have bred there, and I enclose what purports to be a photograph of one of the mares with her foal, beside an ordinary horse for comparison of size. I must say the story has decidedly a fishy aspect about it and I would like to see it verified.

We are much interested here in your mother's experiment of a greenhouse made of cheesecloth. Quite a large slice of the orchard has been enclosed, and tomatoes, oats, &c. have been grown under the cheesecloth tent and outside it. Already there is a 9 vast

Library of Congress

difference between the outside and the inside vegetation in favor of inside. We expect great results.

The French have been hard at work upon submarine torpedo boats, and now they have discovered that the torpedo boats can be seen at great distances from a captive balloon. You know how birds see fish in the water from a great height, and it is now demonstrated that a captive balloon attached to a war vessel can spot a submarine torpedo boat advancing towards her destruction.

What do you think of my latest kite — not tried yet. Of course the photographs enclosed are for your own eye, and for those people you like to take into your confidence in telling them what your father is doing. Of course I should be very much mortified should any of these pictures find their way into the public prints before I am ready. If you can keep quiet I may occasionally let you know what I am doing.

Give my best love to Josephine Sicard and thank her for her nice letter

Your loving father Alexander Graham Bell